

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OPR-02

HEW-04 COME-00 /063 W

----- 077073

R 171355Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3407

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 1847

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GY

SUBJECT: GOG AMENDS CONSTITUTION IN SCHOOL TAKE-OVER

REF: (A) GEORGETOWN A-58 (SEPT 4, 197)

(B) GEORGETOWN A-103 (OCT. 3, 1975)

SUMMARY: PARLIAMENT LAST WEEK APPROVED A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT GIVING THE GOG THE POWER TO TAKE OVER EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES WITHOUT COMPENSATION IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT ITS PLAN TO PROVIDE FREE UNIVERSAL EDUCATION AND, IN EFFECT, ENDING PRIVATE FORMAL EDUCATION HERE. FACING ONLY MINOR OPPOSITION, MAINLY FROM CHURCH LEADERS, THE GOG INTENDS TO INTRODUCE A RELEVANT, "SOCIALIST CONTENT" INTO THE NATION'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, STRESSING THE ASCENDANCY OF THE SOCIETY OVER THE INDIVIDUAL. THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGE IN THE SCHOOLS SO FAR, HOWEVER, DUE TO THE GOG'S TEMPORARY INABILITY TO FULLY IMPLEMENT ITS PROGRAM. END
SUMMARY:

1. THE GOG HAS FORCED LAST WEEK TO SEEK A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT ITS PLAN TO PROVIDE FREE EDUCATION FROM NURSERY SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY.

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2. THE AMENDMENT, PASSED OVERWHELMINGLY ON SEPTEMBER 10, GRANTS

THE GOVT EHR POWER TO ACQUIRE WITHOUT COMPENSATION ALL BUILDINGS AND OTHER FACILITIES USED FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES IN 1976. THIS INCLUDES SOME 380 PREPARATORY, 300 PRIMARY, AND 16 SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

3. THE GOVT, WHICH CLAIMED THE BILL WAS NECESSITATED BY THE REFUSAL OF SEVERAL DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS TO VOLUNTARILY HAND OVER THEIR PROPERTY, WAS SUPPORTED BY THE OPPOSITION, MOSCOW-LINE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP). THE PPP INSISTED, HOWEVER, THAT PART OF A CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION PROTECTING THE RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO PROVIDE RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION FOR THEIR MEMBERS BE RETAINED.

4. THE GOVT DID NOT APPROVE A PPP REQUEST TO INTRODUCE MARXIST-LENINIST TEACHINGS IN THE SCHOOLS. BURNHAM IN A SPEECH TO THE PARLIAMENT SEPTEMBER 10 ON THIS MATTER REPORTEDLY SAID HE DID NOT WANT COMMUNISM FOR GUYANA. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT HIS PARTY DESIRED AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN WHICH STUDENTS "UNDERSTAND THE TRANSCENDENTAL IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIETY OVER THE INDIVIDUAL, AND WITH "AN ORIENTATION RELEVANT TO THE SOCIETY WE ARE BUILDING AND THE TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES WE ARE USING FOR BUILDING SOCIALISM IN GUYANA". HE ALSO STRESSED THAT FREEDOM OF WORSHIP WOULD BE PROTECTED.

5. COMMENT: THIS FINAL STEP IN THE "NATIONALIZATION" OF THE COUNTRY'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN EFFECT PUTS AN END TO ANY LARGE-SCALE PRIVATE EDUCATION HERE BY PROHIBITING SCHOOLS FROM CHARGING TUITION.

6. FEEBLE OPPOSITION TO THE TAKE-OVER HAS COME PRIMARILY FROM THE CHURCHES (ESPECIALLY THE ANGLICANS AND CATHOLICS). THEY ARE SUPPORTED IN PARLIAMENT BY THE TWO MEMBERS OF THE MODERATE, MINUSCULE UNITED FORCE, WHICH CHARGED THAT THE BILL CONTRAVENES THE UN CHARTER.

7. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER THE "CATHOLIC STANDARD", MADE THE MOST POIGNANT CRITICISM OF THE AMENDMENT. IT NOTED IN A FRONT-PAGE COMMENT, "THIS IS A VERY OMINOUS DEVELOPMENT. TODAY IT IS THE SCHOOLS; TOMORROW SHOSE PROPERTY MAY NOT BE ACQUIRED ON THE SAME PRINCIPLE? WHAT IS MOST ALARMING IS THE SPEED WITH WHICH OUR CONSTITUTION CAN BE CHANGED. WITH LITTLE DISCUSSION, WITH

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NO OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PEOPLE TO BE INFORMED OF ARGUMENTS AND TO EXPRESS AN OPINION, THEIR SACRED RIGHTS CAN BE ABROGATED OVERNIGHT". MOST GUYANESE, HOWEVER, ARE PLEASED WITH THE IDEA OF FREE UNIVERSAL EDUCATION AND HAVE OVERLOOKED THE POTENTIAL DANGERS.

8. SO FAR, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGE IN THE SCHOOLS, WHICH REOPENED LAST WEEK, DUE TO THE GOV'S TEMPORARY INABILITY TO IMPLEMENT ALL OF ITS PROGRAMS. THE GOVT IS RETAINING MOST OF THE PRIVATE

TEACHERS SINCE IT IS UNABLE TO PROVIDE SUBSTITUTES AND IS
STILL SEEKING INSTRUCTORS FROM OVERSEAS, ESPECIALLY FROM THE
U.K. TEXT-BOOKS, WHICH ARE ALSO SUPPOSED TO BE FREE, ARE STILL
IN SHORT SUPPLY DESPITE THE ALLEGED IMPORTATION BY THE STATE-OWNED
NATIONAL TRADING CORPORATION OF NEARLY US DOLS 1 MILLION WORTH OF
MATERIALS. IT SEEMS APPARENT, HOWEVER, THAT EVENTUALLY A "SOCIALIST
CONTENT". (I.E. THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS' IDEOLOGY)
WILL BE INTRODUCED INTO THE SYSTEM.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: EDUCATIONAL REFORMS, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976GEORGE01847
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760353-0789
From: GEORGETOWN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760950/aaaabqke.tel
Line Count: 124
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 GEORGETOWN A-58, 76 GEORGETOWN A-103
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUL 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <08 JUL 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOG AMENDS CONSTITUTION IN SCHOOL TAKE-OVER
TAGS: PINT, SEDU, GY
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006